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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000681

SIPDIS

FOR H, NEA, AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/06/2018

TAGS: PHUM PGOV KDEM BA

SUBJECT: BAHRAINI ACTIVISTS TO BRIEF CONGRESSIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS CAUCUS

REF: A. MANAMA 471
 1B. MANAMA 593
 1C. STATE 103949

Classified By: CDA Christopher Henzel for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Three Bahraini opposition and human rights activists are scheduled to brief the Congressional Human Rights Caucus in Washington on October 15. One, Abduljalil Alsingace, is the spokesman for the Haq movement, which the GOB accuses of inspiring street violence. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Representative Frank Wolf, co-chair of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus (CHRC) has invited Bahraini activists Nabeel Rajab, Abduljalil Alsingace, and Maryam Al Khawaja to brief the caucus on October 15. At Congressman Wolf's request, emboffs forwarded letters of invitation to the activists on September 22. All three told us they were already aware of the invitations and planned to attend.

13. (C) The upcoming hearing is the focus of much discussion in local political circles. Rajab asked poloff September 27 how the hearings worked, how many representatives would attend, and what the likely impact would be. Dr. Jassim Hussein, a member of parliament from the Wifaq opposition party (ref B) told CDA he would contact Wolf's office to request an invitation for himself in order to provide "balance." Hussein said Alsingace has a record of exaggerating charges against the Bahraini authorities; Hussein was concerned that Alsingace would detract from the credibility of more careful Bahraini oppositionists.

14. (C) Bahraini Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa and Ambassador Houda Nonoo raised the caucus briefing with A/S Welch on the margins of UNGA on September 26 (ref C).

Background on Invitees

15. (C) For Department's reference, we provide background on the three invitees and their relationships with post:

Rajab

16. (C) Nabeel Rajab leads the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR). The Bahraini authorities ordered the dissolution of the BCHR in 2004 for allegedly engaging in political activities outside of its charter. However, the Center continues to operate despite its lapsed legal registration. Most Bahraini human rights activists, including president of the Bahrain Human Rights Society (BHRS) Abdulla Alderazi, see Rajab as an active defender of human rights who felt it necessary to cooperate with elements in the Shi'a community that the government views as radical. Rajab was a founding member of BHRS who left to establish the BCHR when BHRS began

gravitating toward the socialist corner of Bahrain's political scene. BHRS continues to operate legally.

¶7. (C) Post is in frequent contact with Rajab, who is an important source for our human rights reporting.

Alsingace

¶8. (C) Abduljalil Alsingace acts as the international and media specialist for the unregistered Haq movement (ref B), which represents Shi'a who oppose participation in parliament. A former university professor, Alsingace developed contacts with a number of international NGOs, including Frontline Defenders, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International, which often re-post his press releases on their websites. Alsingace joined Wifaq in 2002. He befriended Hassan Mushaima, the society's then-vice president, and joined Mushaima to form Haq when Wifaq decided to register with the government as a political society and engage in parliamentary elections. Alsingace often boasts that Haq is influential with the U.S. Congress. The Bahraini authorities blame Haq for inspiring the Shi'a youth who often throw rocks and Molotov cocktails at police.

¶9. (SBU) Alsingace demanded a meeting with President Bush to present him with a petition during his January 2008 state visit. Post instead made an Emboff available on a holiday to receive from Alsingace at the Embassy's entrance a copy of a petition addressed to the UN. (The copy, complete with accompanying signature sheets, weighed 16 kilograms.) Post passed the petition to White House staff. Alsingace was

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angry that he did not gain access to the President and was later quoted by the Washington Post as claiming that the Embassy refused to receive his petition.

¶10. (SBU) Alsingace's brother, Mohammed, was sentenced in July to five years for his role in the December 2007 riots (ref A). The lead counsel in that case, Abdulla Shamlawi, is also one of post's regular contacts. Embassy informed Shamlawi in June that we wished to meet with relatives of the December rioting defendants to discuss allegations of prisoner abuse. Shamlawi and the families have not responded to the request.

Al Khawaja

¶11. (C) Maryam Al Khawaja is the daughter of Abdulhadi Al Khawaja, former president of the dissolved BCHR and himself closely connected with Mushaima and Alsingace. She participated in a 2006 MEPI student leader program. On her application, she identified herself as a member of the Bahrain Women's Society, the unregistered Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights, and BCHR. According to a former BCHR member and current Public Affairs FSN, Maryam is her father's daughter - Islamist, outspoken, and direct.

¶12. (SBU) Al Khawaja attends Embassy events focusing on women's rights.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/manama/>

HENZEL